

UNREPRESENTED NATIONS AND PEOPLES ORGANIZATION

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European Parliament
Conference on
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Somaliland



In the spotlight

**Vietnam's Unrelenting Onslaught on
Khmer-Kroms' Religious Freedom**

Vietnam's Unrelenting Onslaught on Khmer-Kroms' Religious Freedom

1 May 2018

The Khmer-Krom are an indigenous people living in the Southern part of Vietnam, called Kampuchea-Krom, which translates as "Lower Cambodia". For geostrategic reasons – mainly because of the region's access to the sea through the Mekong Delta – the minority has been the target of severe repression from the Vietnamese authorities for now more than 40 years. State-sponsored repression affects all walks of their lives, from social and economic rights to the ability to participate in Vietnam's political decision-making processes, but, first and foremost, the Vietnamese government seeks to curtail the Khmer-Kroms' freedom to practice Theravada Buddhism, thereby jeopardising their culture, history and identity. Even though, on paper, the Vietnamese Constitution enshrines principles such as that of the freedom of belief and of religion, Vietnamese authorities systematically interfere with the religious life of the Khmer-Krom and brutally crack down on Buddhist monks and other dissidents who engage in peaceful civil resistance to demand their religious rights to be respected.

The government-imposed system of religious interference and suppression is perfidious and affects even the smallest details of religious life. To practice any kind of ritual or be ordained as a Buddhist monk, for instance, the Khmer-Krom have to obtain a permission from government agencies. They are also forbidden to speak their own mother tongue in religious contexts and monks are expected to speak in Vietnamese whenever engaging with the government. Even when amongst each other, Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks are instructed to speak Vietnamese. In order to undermine the Khmer-Kroms' peaceful movement, the Vietnamese government also tries to sow discord within the religious community and uses secret agents to keep an eye on their activities in their temples. Monks are either pressured or bribed into accepting to monitor and report any action taking places in the temples.

Those individuals who dare defy arbitrary government restrictions, in particular Buddhist monks, risk falling victim to detention and extra-judicial arrests, as evidenced by the case of Theravada Buddhist monk Liv Ny. Having been the head of the Serey Tasek Buddhist Temple, he had been sent to jail for four years, from May 2013 to May 2017, simply for refusing to defrock a fellow monk in his temple who had been accused of teaching the Khmer language, history and geography. Dozens of other Khmer-Krom monks have engaged in similar acts of peaceful civil resistance or organised demonstrations in the last few years. Usually the Vietnamese government answers with excessive use of military force, arbitrary arrests, continuous interrogations, imprisonments without a fair trial, false accusations, forced confessions and heavy surveillance. In most cases, the government invokes Articles 87 and 88 of the Vietnamese Penal Code, falsely accusing Khmer-Krom monks of "disturbing the Vietnamese society" and "involving with anti-Vietnamese government activities".

In addition to these attacks on individuals, the Vietnamese government also targets whole religious communities by infringing on land and customary rights regarding places of worship. On a regular basis, the government orders temples to be destructed to "make room" for residential housing, agriculture or markets. As the lands on which Buddhist temples are erected are regarded as sacred and have great importance for the Khmer-Kroms' religious lives, these acts are another form of direct attacks on their religious freedom. In one rare case in 2017, one such land dispute case was brought to international attention, with the result that monks were allowed to move back to a temple which was supposed to be destroyed. Sadly, this is just an isolated case which by no means reassures Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks whose plights rarely make international headlines.

Given this lack of international attention, the UNPO stands with the Khmer-Krom community and other human rights organisations, such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, and condemns in the strongest sense the Vietnamese government's infringement on freedom of religion and belief. Through joint-activities, such as a [conference](#) organised with its Member organisation the Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation (KKF), the UNPO will work diligently to raise awareness of the case and make sure the international community does not overlook the Khmer-Kroms' struggle any longer.

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UPR REPORT ON SUPPRESSION OF TIBET CIVIL SOCIETY

4 April 2018

The Tibet Bureau submitted a report on the occasion of the 31st Universal Periodic Review of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Contributed to by the UNPO and other Tibetan activist groups, the report brings attention to China's failure to implement measures included in the last periodic review, as well as new violations relating to environmental degradation and excessive surveillance and persecution of civil society in Tibet. Read the report [here](#).

DOCUMENTARY SCREENING ON GUATEMALA'S MAYA WOMEN, BRUSSELS

10 April 2018

The UNPO, in collaboration with association [InterCambio](#), screened a documentary focussing on the Maya indigenous women in Guatemala and their difficulties in accessing health services. The screening was followed by an interactive discussion between the audience, the InterCambio team, a UNPO representative and MEP Julie Ward. Read more [here](#).

DOCUMENTARY SCREENING ON LAOS'S FORGOTTEN HMONG, BRUSSELS

11 April 2018

The UNPO and the Congress of World Hmong People (CWHP), in collaboration with MEP Ignazio Corrao, convened a screening of David Beriain's "The CIA's Lost Army" focussing on the Hmong living in the Laotian jungle. The screening was followed by a Q&A session with the MEP and the documentary's protagonists. For more information, click [here](#).

PARTICIPATION IN JOURNALISM FESTIVAL, PERUGIA

14 April 2018

Ms Mona Silavi, UNPO coordinator for freedom of religion and belief, delivered a speech during the International Journalism Festival in Perugia, Italy. More than 700 independent journalists and activists – including representatives of several UNPO Members – participated in the festival and discussed news and events not covered by mainstream media. For more information and a video of the event, click [here](#).

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UNPO WELCOMES ASSYRIAN CONFEDERATION OF EUROPE IN ITS BRUSSELS OFFICE

14 April 2018

The Assyrian Confederation of Europe (ACE) inaugurated its activities with a small ceremony held in the UNPO's office in Brussels, a room of which ACE will now use. The UNPO has been working with the Assyrian community for a long time through the membership of the Assyrian Universal Alliance. The proximity with another Assyrian umbrella organisation represents a new and welcomed opportunity to strengthen our cooperation with the community and to develop common projects and campaigns.

CONFERENCE ON CHINA-PAKISTAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR, BERLIN

23 April 2018

The UNPO organised a conference entitled "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC): Understanding Challenges and Impacts on Gilgit-Baltistan and Beyond" in Berlin. The event, hosted by Dr Marcus Faber MP, brought together researchers and academics to brief politicians, state officials, the media and the general public on the current state of affairs in the regions affected by the mega-development project, as well as on China's rapidly expanding presence and influence in South Asia, with a focus on the particular status of the disputed territory of Gilgit-Baltistan - the centrepiece of CPEC. Find more information [here](#).

UYGHUR PROTEST AND EP CONFERENCE, BRUSSELS

27 April 2018

The UNPO, together with its Member, the World Uyghur Congress, organised a protest in Brussels to highlight the human rights abuses and increased surveillance operations that have a severe impact on the lives of millions in China's so-called Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. The latest developments show a very worrying situation with the mass incarceration of hundreds of thousands in political "re-education centres". The protest was a success and gathered approximately 2,000 people who marched from Square de Meeûs to the seat of the European Commission and External Action Service. Find more information [here](#).

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UNPO AT UN PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES, NEW YORK



16-27 April 2018

The 17th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues gave organisations working on indigenous rights and representatives of indigenous communities a platform to discuss and exchange views on the topic. Taking place from 16-27 April 2018, the dialogue centred on the theme "Indigenous peoples' collective rights to lands, territories and resources".

In addition to members of the UNPO Secretariat, representatives from the Ogaden, Chittagong Hill Tracts, Sindh, West Balochistan, Iranian Kurdistan, Southern Mongolia, East Turkestan and Khmer-Krom attended the Forum to stand in solidarity with indigenous peoples across the world. Ms Juweyria Ali of the Ogaden and Mr Mangal Chakma of the Chittagong Hill Tracts were able to take the floor during the discussions to make statements on behalf of their organisations, and the UNPO also addressed the Forum on behalf of the World Sindhi Congress. The Ogaden and Sindhi representatives also had the opportunity to meet with the Special Rapporteur on rights of indigenous peoples to discuss the myriad of issues that their groups are facing.

While the trip was successful in many ways it was not without its hiccups. Most notably, Mr Dolkun Isa, the President of the World Uyghur Congress and Vice President of the UNPO, echoing the events of last year, was at first [barred from entering the United Nations](#) and unable to attend the Forum due to issues with obtaining security clearance, most likely due to Chinese interference. Fortunately, after many meetings and several days of waiting Mr Isa was [cleared to attend the Forum](#), although this came only during the second week which primarily consisted of closed meetings. For more information on UNPO's participation in the forum click [here](#).

UNITED NATIONS CERD SESSION, GENEVA

1-2 May 2018

A UNPO representative will attend the 95th Session of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). With Mauritania being on the agenda for this session, representatives of the Initiative for the Resurgence of Abolitionism in Mauritania will raise the issue of widespread modern-day slavery in the country, which affects first and foremost the Haratin community. With over 43,000 people trapped in modern slavery in the country, Mauritania is the country with the highest prevalence of slavery in the world. Find the agenda for the 95th CERD Session [here](#).

EP CONFERENCE ON STATEHOOD AND RECENT ELECTIONS IN SOMALILAND

22 May 2018

The UNPO, in collaboration with MEP Frank Engel, will organise a conference entitled "Somaliland: Negotiating Statehood, Perspectives through the 2017 EOM Report" at the European Parliament. This conference is the fruit of the recent democratic expression of the November 2017 presidential elections, which saw the peaceful transition of power to Muse Bihi Abdi from the Kulmiye party. Therefore, following the release of the election observation mission (EOM) report in the United Kingdom (UK), the UNPO will organise this roundtable to present the report and raise awareness about this topic among European politicians, journalists and academics. More information [here](#).

CALL FOR PAPERS AND CONFERENCE, MIDDELBURG

30 May 2018

Between 30 May and 1 June, the University College Roosevelt of Utrecht University will hold a two-day conference titled "Territories in dispute: epistemologies, resistances, spiritualities and rights" which forms part of the International Conference Ninth Multidisciplinary Meeting of Indigenous Peoples (EMPI IX). The hosts of the conference have issued a call for papers for this conference which address the themes of rights for nature; indigenous peoples'

cultural heritage; indigenous feminism and patriarchy and intercultural dialogues along with many others. More info [here](#).

CONFERENCE ON THE CASE OF THE KHMER-KROM PEOPLE IN VIETNAM

2 June 2018

The KKF, together with the UNPO, will organise a one-day international conference on 'The Case of the Indigenous People Khmer-Krom: Human Rights in Vietnam' in Paris on 2 June 2018 to raise awareness about the human rights violations perpetrated against the Khmer-Krom in the Mekong Delta, Kampuchea-Krom. The conference will be hosted by French Senator Mr André Gattolin and will gather members of the Khmer community, scholars, elected officials and members of the civil society. While the morning session will feature panels focussing on contemporary human rights abuses in the Mekong Delta and Kampuchea-Krom, the afternoon session will focus on the international human rights system meant to protect and promote the fundamental rights for the Khmer-Krom. To register, click [here](#).

Upcoming Events:

1-2 May: 95th CERD Session, Geneva

22 May: Conference on the Statehood of Somaliland, Brussels

30 May: Call for Papers and Conference, Middelburg, NL

2 June: Conference on Case of Khmer-Krom People in Vietnam, Paris

22-23 June: UNPO Presidency Meeting

Summer: Congressional Briefing on Slavery in the Sahel, Washington DC

UNPO PRESIDENCY MEETING, BARCELONA

22-23 June 2018

UNPO Presidency Members will gather in Barcelona, Catalonia, to assess the last three months of UNPO's activities and to discuss the strategy for the coming months. The programme will be complemented by a conference organised in

collaboration with our Catalan partners.

BRIEFING ON SLAVERY IN THE SAHEL, WASHINGTON DC

Summer 2018

The UNPO, in cooperation with the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, will organise a briefing which will look at the struggle for the eradication of slavery in the Sahel. Bringing together the personal experiences of some of UNPO's Members and the expertise of academics, researchers and activists, the briefing's panellists will discuss ways in which slavery is embedded into the culture of some of the Sahel's communities and offer policy recommendations for the US Congress and government.



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We rely on financial support from our Members and friends to continue our work each year. Such donations are crucial to ensure the continued full participation and engagement of a great number of unrepresented communities, indigenous peoples, minorities and occupied or unrecognised territories. The 2015-17 General Secretary's Activity Report provides an overview of the activities we have been working on over the past years with the help of our [partners](#). Please do also spread the word about UNPO or invite your friends to like our [Facebook](#) page or follow us on [Twitter](#).

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